# LATEST NEWS FROM THE WRITING AND PUBLISHING WORLD

## THE BOOK OF THE WEEK.

**MARK TWAIN'S LETTERS. Arranged with comment by Albert Bigelow Paine. 2 vols. (Harper & Brothers.)**

"I invariably regret the things I do on the spur of the moment." Thus wrote Mark Twain to Thomas Bailey Aldrich in 1871, but, he adds: "Who would find out that I am a natural fool if I kept always cool and never let nature come to the surface? Nobody." It is because he let nature come to the surface that he is the most representatively American man of letters this country has thus far produced. Only Whitman rises to that distinction beside him. All others in whom our pride is justified show the tilling of an ancient culture, he trod the North American soil of the nineteenth century and of the twentieth with a firm, free step of his own. He had his finger on the pulse of humanity. We may be glad of him in every aspect. If in the brilliant motley of his work there are some soiled patches, these only prove that his work was not all done in a luxurious study—much of it was—but also amid the strife and dusty struggle of the world. He claimed to be a journalist, not an author. He adored Howells and deplored his own ineptitudes. He gives Bret Harte the credit for having changed him "from an awkward utterer of coarse grotesqueness to a writer of paragraphs and chapters that have found a certain favor in the eyes of even some of the very decentest people in the land." To his wife's gentle judgment he owed most; she suppressed his exuberance.

A distinguished American painter, commenting on the streak of vulgarity which is to be found in every man, once said: "In one man this finds vent in words, in another it appears in his paint." This caustic comment is applicable. The touching beauty of Mark Twain's domestic relations, his devotion to high ideals, his lofty sense of honor, both civic and financial, were qualities that lived side by side with a certain contempt for the refinements of literature—as witness his harsh and ungallant pronouncement on one of the most delightfully refined prose artists in his history of the English novel, Jane Austen; his dislike of Hawthorne, George Eliot, and above all of Henry James,—and were qualities consistent with an unrestrained profanity and with not a few lapses into other forms of vulgarity, shot through with an imagination which often called for more than an ounce of civet. And this is written in no pharisaical spirit and without any real regret that the case was such. It is a pity that these few patches in his radiant robes should have led some fine souls to turn from his fresh vigor and regard him as a literary tramp. Very few, however, of those who read the letters in which such traits appear or of those who have had friendship's privilege of seeing unpublished manuscripts, while yet the writer lived, will deny that they derived a certain bracing exhilaration from this muscular, masculine, naked strength. Sincerity is always sure of a strong appeal. And this gem-cut sincerity characterized all that Mark Twain said, wrote, or did.

In a letter to Henry Ward Beecher in 1885, Clemens refers to an outburst of General Sherman's about Grant. "The idea," said Sherman, "of all this nonsense about Grant not being able to stand rude language and indelicate stories. Why, Grant was full of humor, and full of the appreciation of it. It makes me sick—that newspaper nonsense. Grant was no namby-pamby fool, he was a MAN—all over—rounded and complete." If Mark Twain had ever been accused of namby-pambyness, General Sherman might have spoken thus of him. The letter to Beecher continues: "I wish I had thought of it! I would have said to General Grant 'Put the drunkenness in the Memoirs—and the repentance and reform. Trust the people.'" Into his own works and letters Mark Twain put all, and trusted the people. His trust was not misplaced.

This reference to Grant reminds, parenthetically, of Mark Twain's letter to THE NEW YORK SUN (omitted from the index in this work) of July 27, 1885. How many of us remember the controversy over the selection of a location for Grant's tomb? In that letter Clemens prophesies that in five hundred years Washington will be a deserted hamlet, while the situation of New York assures it perennial importance. "I observe," he writes in conclusion, "that the common and strongest objection to New York is that she is not 'national ground.' Let us give ourselves no uneasiness about that. Wherever General Grant's body lies, that is national ground."

The unfailing taste and secure judgment of Mr. Albert Bigelow Paine have in these two volumes of more than four hundred pages each brought together a collection of letters worthy to stand beside the monumental "Life." More than many of the letters quoted in the biography are here reprinted and properly so. There are not too many of the earlier and less interesting letters included and just enough of those written during the tragic period of financial distress to throw light upon the sufferings of a noble soul in a dark and vital time. The character of Mark Twain emerges from these pages, not changed in any feature, but in every feature amplified. They show in Clemens's own words how thoroughly the synthetic work of the biographer has been done. They furnish the documentary proofs of the statements and deductions of the "Life." Some of the narrative matter from the biography has here been used as illustrative comment and to good purpose. So admirably has Mr. Paine presented his subject in Life and letters that no further summing up will be needed until another generation has reached maturity.

It may be permitted the writer, who is proud of a remote, morganatic relationship with the biography, to quote a phrase from a letter he received just after the publication of that work. A well known playwright wrote: "Thank God! At last that little Scottish sycophant has been dethroned and instead of Boswell's Johnson we now have Paine's Twain." There may be exaggeration in this enthusiasm; there certainly was sincerity in the sentiment.

We who knew Mark Twain in his latest days remember him as one always genial, if occasionally petulant in a whimsical way, full of fun but sometimes with the seared smile of sadness deepening his wit, violently irreverent wherever he thought he detected sham, but kindly without fail and lovable ever. If Heine was the smile that passed over the face of Nature, then Mark Twain was her rollicking laughter. But the froth and foam of dancing waves are seldom seen in shallow waters; there must be an ocean underneath. In Mark Twain's great heart lay a wealth of human love and in his rich and rugged mind a profound consciousness of man's place in nature and of his destiny, while over all this rippled inextinguishable laughter. We have reason to be grateful for these letters.

CHARLES HARVEY GENUNG.

**SPANISH ARCHITECTURE OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY. By Arthur Byne and Mildred Stapley. (G. P. Putnam's Sons.) $7.50.**

*Spanish Architecture of the Sixteenth Century* is a work intended primarily for the serious student of architecture, although many an art loving tourist would do well to make it an adjunct when visiting the ancient cities of northern Spain. As the authors are careful to point out, the Renaissance reached Spain singularly late and held sway there for a comparatively brief period. It flourished principally in Castile, and its interest to the student lies primarily in the fact that it was unhesitatingly blended with the older Spanish styles and departed more radically from the established Renaissance type than did any architecture north of the Pyrenees.

It is absolutely a distinct product from that picturesque semi-Moorish stucco architecture of Andalusia, which was carried to the Spanish colonies, later to be accepted throughout both Americas as typical of the mother country. * * * While not wishing to drag down the stucco house nor its suitability to the Andalusian climate one is forced to protest against its standing for the whole of Spanish architecture. Such misapprehension means that the buildings of Castile, the very heart of the country, have been passed over for a type acknowledged by all Spaniards, except the Andalusians, to be exotic.

The Plateresque, or Spanish Renaissance, period covers less than a single century, beginning approximately with Enrique de Egas, who in 1501 erected in Toledo the Hospital of Santa Cruz—the first of the fantasias plateresques—and closing with Juan de Herrera, architect of the Escorial (1560-1584), the so called eighth wonder of the world. Yet the intervening years are rich in craftsmen of high rank whose chief misfortune was that, unlike the great Italians, they lacked a Vasari to perpetuate their fame.

*Lieut. Hector MacQuarrie, Author of "How to Live at the Front." Dutton.*

**PRIVATE PEAT, His Own Story. By Harold R. Peat. (Bobbs-Merrill Co.) $1.50.**

There are a great many war books already; so many that criticism of a new one neither greatly better nor worse than its fellows must concern itself chiefly with pointing out how the particular volume in question differs from all the rest, and from what special angle it throws light upon the familiar horrors and adventures of the front. *Private Peat* is of the personal narrative type, a direct and simple account of the author's experiences in the first Canadian contingent. Of the humor and tragedy of those early months in the trenches we have heard many times—sometimes with greater skill or insight in the telling, but never with a more honest vigor. There is more than the usual share of argument in this book, more of the rights and wrongs of the war urged from the point of view of the intelligent man in the ranks. And there are one or two magnificent stories of heroism, like that of the officer with both legs broken during an attack who crawled forward to the German trench whistling his men on until the trench was won. It is the misfortune of such a book to be one of many similar accounts; for if it were the only one it would become wonderful without the changing of a line.

**THE MESSIAH OF THE CYLINDER. By Victor Rousseau. (A. C. McClurg & Co.) $1.35.**

Nearly every author with any invention at one time or another has written a prophecy of the future, a story of a twentieth century human being in a twenty-first or twenty-second century world. But Victor Rousseau in the two most important instances of this kind of story is original. His story is not a dream—and the scientifically managed world did not work. In a way Mr. Rousseau is asking the reader to appreciate the Christianity which rather bores so many of us. Yet it is not a boresome religion which he praises, rather it is humanity, a humanity which embraces the finest ideals of Christianity and which is as instinctive to men not technically "Christians" as to the most impassioned Gentile. "The Messiah of the Cylinder" tells of two young scientists who have discovered a means of prolonging indefinitely not only unconscious cell life but also an entire organism—a living animal. Lazaroff, the abler scientist and the weaker man, has designed vacuum cylinders in which the air may be kept at a temperature forbidding germ life to flourish. After short preliminaries it is an easy matter to get the two scientists and the inevitable girl into the cylinders, and one hundred years later to introduce them: Lazaroff as leader of his new world, Esther, whose confinement in the cylinder was longest, as a goddess, and Arnold, who tells the story, as the Messiah who comes to free the mechanically perfect world from its soulless efficiency. Equality, efficiency, eugenics—pet theories are attacked on every side. It is an interesting story, but not to be taken too seriously.